

Strange Things by orphan_account

Series: Stranger Things Series With Horrible Titles [1]

Category: Star Trek, Star Trek: Alternate Original Series (Movies), Star Trek: Mirror Universe, Star Trek: The Original Series, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: M/M

Language: English

Characters: Aurelan Kirk, Christopher Pike, Finnegan (Star Trek), George Samuel Kirk, Heihachiro Nogura, James Komack, James T. Kirk, Joyce Byers, Leonard "Bones" McCoy, Montgomery "Scotty" Scott, Pavel Chekov, Spock

Relationships: James T. Kirk/Spock, Sam Kirk/Hikaru Sulu

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-02-04

Updated: 2018-02-16

Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:07:42

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Chapters: 5

Words: 18,271

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Jim and his friends are walking in the woods one day, looking for their missing friend Pavel, when they run into an alien kid with telepathic powers.

1. The Vanishing of Pavel Chekov

Author's Note:

It gets more original as it goes on I swear

Jim lowered his voice to make it as ominous as possible. “Something is coming. Something hungry for blood. A shadow grows on the wall behind you, swallowing you in darkness. It is almost here.”

“What is it?” Pavel asked.

“Probably the Demogorgon,” Bones said.

“It’s not the Demogorgon,” Scotty said.

“An army of *troglodytes* charge into the chamber!” Jim slammed down the gamepiece.

“Troglodytes?”

“Told ya,” Bones smirked.

“Wait a minute,” Jim said softly, dramatically. “Did you hear that? That—that sound. Boom... boom... boom!” He slammed his hands on the table. “That didn’t come from the troglodytes, no; that—that came from something else.”

He let the silence stretch with tension.

“The Demogorgon!”

The entire table groaned, and Jim was preening.

“We’re in deep shit,” Bones muttered.

“Pavel, your action!”

“I don’t know!”

“Fireball him!” Scotty said.

“I’d have to roll a thirteen or higher!”

“Too risky. Cast a protection spell,” Bones said.

“Don’t be a coward. Fireball him!”

“Cast protection!”

Jim hit the table once again. “The Demogorgon is tired of your silly human bickering! It stomps towards you. Boom!”

“Fireball him!”

“Cast protection!”

“Another stomp, boom!”

“Cast protection.”

“He roars in anger!”

“Fireball!” Pavel cried, tossing the dice across the game board, where it promptly got knocked off onto the floor. The kids all scrambled out of their seats, cursing and frantically searching for the lost die.

“Jim!” Winona called from upstairs. Her voice was lost in the chaos of the basement, and she opened the door above the stairs to be better heard. “Jim!”

“Mom, we’re in the middle of a campaign.”

“You mean the end? It’s fifteen after.”

He scrambled up the stairs after her, following her into the kitchen.
“Mom, wait, just twenty more minutes!”

“It’s a school night, Jim. You can finish next weekend.”

“But that’ll ruin the flow!”

“Jim—“

“I’m serious, Mom. The campaign took two weeks to plan. How was I supposed to know it was gonna take ten hours?”

She turned to him. “You’ve been playing for ten hours?”

Seeing the look on her face, he conceded to the lost cause and turned to the livingroom. “Dad, don’t you think that twenty more—“

“I think you should listen to your mother.”

Down in the basement, Pavel held up the di and cried out, “Oh, I got it! Does the seven count?”

“It was a seven?” Scotty asked. “Did Jim see it?”

Pavel shook his head.

“Then it doesn’t count.”

They finished pulling on their jackets and packing up the game, heading out to the garage where their bikes were. Bones was a few minutes later than the rest.

“There’s something wrong with your brother,” he said.

“What’re you talking about?” Jim asked.

“He’s got a stick up his ass.”

Scotty snorted. “Yeah. It’s because he’s been dating that douchebag, Hikaru Sulu.”

“He’s turning into a real jerk.”

“He’s always been a real jerk,” Jim said.

“Nuh-uh. He used to be cool. Like that time he dressed up as an elf for our Elder tree campaign,” Bones said.

“That was four years ago!”

Bones shrugged, and the group said their goodbyes, speeding off their separate ways. Pavel hung back a second.

“It was a seven.”

“Huh?”

“The roll, it was a seven,” he said. “The Demogorgon got me.”

Pavel didn’t think much of it when he decided to cut through past the military base grounds. It was just a shortcut. One he’d taken a thousand times before.

He didn’t think much of it when the old light on his cheap bike flickered out.

He didn’t think it was unusual when he hit a rock and went tumbling off the path.

Then he heard something growling deep and close and he got up and he ran.

He sprinted into his house and locked the door behind him, still running. “Mom? Aurelan? Mom?”

He pressed his face against a dirty window pane, trying to see past the night fog and the clothes hung up on the line.

A shadowy, inhuman figure.

He ran for the phone and dialed the number with trembling fingers. “Hello? Hello?”

The sound of screeching nails on a chalkboard. He hung up.

The figure passed by the plate glass of the door. The lock undid itself from the outside.

Pavel ran. He sprinted outside and into the storage shed, pulling out his mother's shotgun and loading it with bullets. He held it, shaky, pointed at the door.

The sound of his own breathing.

The light lit up behind him intensified, and slowly, Pavel turned, looking up at the monstrous creature.

He disappeared. The light flicked off.

"Okay sweetie, I will see you tonight," Joyce said, giving her daughter a hug while she did the dishes.

"Yeah, see you later."

"Where's Pavel?"

"Oh, I didn't get him up yet. He's probably still sleeping."

"Aurelan, you have to make sure he's up."

"I'm making breakfast," she said defensively.

"I told you this a thousand times," she said, heading to her son's room at a rapid pace. "Pavel! Come on, honey. It's time to get up."

She walked into his room to find it empty, and marched right back out to confront her daughter. "He came home last night, right?"

"He's not in his room?"

"Did he come home or not?"

"I don't know."

“You don’t know?”

“No,” she said. “I-I got home late. I was working.”

“You were working?”

“Eric asked if I could cover. I said yeah. I just thought we could use the extra cash.”

“Aurelan, we’ve talked about this.”

“I know, I know.”

“You can’t take shifts when I’m working--!”

“Mom, it’s not a big deal. Look, he was at the Kirks’ all day. I’m sure he just stayed over.”

“I can’t believe you,” she said, shaking her head. “I can’t believe you sometimes.”

She dialed the number that she knew by heart. “Hi, Winona. It’s Joyce... Was that Pavel I heard back there?”

“No, it’s just Jim.”

“Pavel didn’t spend the night?”

“No, he left here a little bit after eight. Why? He’s not home?”

“Um, you know what, I think he just left early for—for school. Thank you so much. Bye.”

“That’s weird. I don’t see him,” Jim said, peering around the school grounds.

“I’m telling you, his mom’s right. Lad probably just went to class early again.”

Bones snorted. “He’s always paranoid Gursky’s gonna give him another pop quiz.”

“Step right up, ladies and gentlemen!” Finnegan’s voice called out from behind them. “Step right up and get your tickets to the freak show.”

They turned to face him and his crony.

“Who do you think would make more money in a freak show?” he asked, looking them over one by one. “Drunk 1, Drunk 2, or their leader, the slut?”

“I’d have to go with the slut,” his friend said. “Though I betcha he makes his money in a very different type of show.”

“Back off,” Jim hissed.

“Yeah? What’ll you do to make me?” Finnegan asked, looking him up and down. Jim’s face burned, and the two boys laughed and shoved past them.

“Assholes,” Bones muttered.

“Don’t pay them any mind, lad,” Scotty said, clapping him on the shoulder.

Pike rolled into the police station bleary-eyed and drowsy.

“Hey, Chief.”

“Damn! You look like hell, Chief.”

“Mm. Rough night,” he said. Nogura raised an eyebrow suggestively, and Pike rolled his eyes. “Not like that. Not that it’s any of your business.”

Flo approached him with a message. “Phil Larsen called. Said some

kids are stealing the gnomes out of his garden again.”

“Ah, of course.”

“On a more pressing matter, Joyce Chekov can’t find her son this morning.”

“I’ll get right on that.” He walked into his office to find Ms. Chekov already sitting in there. She stood when he walked in, buzzing over with nervous energy.

She explained the entire situation in a single, rushed breath. Pike looked at her steadily. She sat back down.

“Look, a boy his age, he’s probably just playing hookie, alright?”

“No. Not my Pavel. He’s not like that. He wouldn’t do that.”

“Everything likes to think that about their children. I’m sorry, Joyce.”

“He’s not... like most kids, Pike. He has a couple friends, but you know kids, they’re mean. They make fun of him, they call him names, they laugh at his clothes—“

“His clothes?”

“I don’t know. Look, he’s... he’s a sensitive kid. He wouldn’t run away. He’s missing.”

“When was the last time you heard from your ex?”

“Uh, last I heard, he was in Des Moines. That was about a year ago. But he has nothing to do with this!”

“Why don’t you give me his number?”

“No, Pike, he has nothing to do with this, trust me.”

“Joyce, ninety-nine out one hundred times a kid goes missing, the kid is with a parent or relative.”

“What about the other time?” she asked.

“What?”

“You said ninety-nine out of a hundred. What about the other time, the one?”

“Joyce.”

“The one?!”

“Joyce, this is Riverside, okay? You wanna know the worst thing that’s ever happened here in the four years I’ve been working here? You wanna know the worst thing?” he asked. “It was when an owl attacked Janice Rand’s head because it thought that her hair was a nest.”

“Okay, fine. I will call Ivan. He will talk to me before he talks to a cop. Just find my son, Pike. Find him.”

Spock was walking barefoot in the woods. The pine needles and stones dug into his feet, his feet that had never been outdoors before. His hospital gown was torn and dirty. His skin wasn’t much better.

A diner.

He snuck in through the back door and made his way to the kitchen, quiet as a mouse, invisible like he had learned to be. There was a half a basket of cold fries. The kitchen had a window to the dining room, and Spock kept a careful eye on it, movements sparse and slow, eating fries with his hands, he was so hungry. He ate them handfuls at a time, swallowing fast.

The man turned. Looked through the window. “Hey!”

Spock grabbed the basket of fries and sprinted for the door. The man chased after him. He was almost to the door when the adult grabbed him by the shoulders and spun him around gruffly. “You think you

can steal from me, boy?”

Then he got a really good look at him. At the shaved head, at the dirt-smeared face, at the body bare of anything except for a grimy hospital gown. At the pointed ears and green-flushed skin.

At the kid who was so clearly starved.

“What the hell?”

Pike came to the school at precisely three o’clock and called the entire science club to the principal’s office for police questioning.

“You said he takes what? Mirkwood?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Jim nodded.

Pike turned to Komack. “Have you ever heard of Mirkwood?”

“I have not. That sounds made up to me.”

“Well, it is from Lord of the Rings,” Scotty said.

“The Hobbit,” Jim corrected.

“Does not particularly matter, lad.”

“Hey. Kids. Focus. Mirkwood?”

“It’s a real road, it’s just the name that’s made up. It’s where Cornwall and Kerley meet. We can show you, if you want,” Jim said.

“No. After school, you are all to go home. Immediately. That means no biking around, looking for your friend, no investigating, no nonsense. This isn’t some Lord of the Rings book.”

“The Hobbit,” Jim said. Bones elbowed him.

“Do I make myself clear?” Pike asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Yeah.”

The diner man, as Spock had taken to thinking of him, grilled up a burger and gave Spock a shirt so big it hung off him like a dress, clean and warm and covering even more than the hospital gown had. He sat him down at a table in the now-deserted diner and watched him eat.

“Your parents forget to feed you?” he asked.

Spock said nothing, keeping his head down and continuing to eat. It was important that he got down as much food as he could before the man turned on him.

“Is that why you ran away?” he asked. “They, uh... They hurt you?” He continued eating, never meeting the man’s eyes.

“You went to the hospital, you got scared, you ran off, you wound up here. Is that it?”

He looked up. He stopped chewing.

The man took the food away from him, taking the sandwich out of his hands and pulling the basket away. “I’ll give this back, alright? And you can have as much as you want. Maybe even some ice cream. But you gotta answer some of my questions first, alright? We got a deal?”

Spock said nothing, wound taut as a wire.

“Alright, let’s start with the easy stuff. My name’s Benny. Benny Hammond.” He held out his hand. Spock stared blankly.

“Nice to meet you. And you are?”

He regarded him the way a caged animal would regard a circling

predator. The man caught sight of the 011 tattooed on his wrist, and Spock yanked his hand back under the table, out of sight.

He knew now. He knew who he was. He would return him for sure, and Spock would go back to that place, and—

“Eleven?” he asked. “What’s that mean?”

He didn’t know?

“What’s it mean?”

“No.”

“Well, I’ll be damned. He speaks,” he said. “No? No what?”

Spock said nothing.

“Alright then. I guess no more food for you.” He took the basket and stood up from the table.

“Eleven.”

“Yeah?” He sat back down.

Spock pointed at his chest. “Eleven.”

He gave him back the food and went to call social services.

“We should be out there right now. We should be helping look for him,” Jim said.

“We’ve been over this, Jim. The chief says—“ Winona started.

“I don’t care what the chief said!”

“Jim!”

“We have to do something! Pavel could be in danger.”

“All the more reason to stay put.”

“Mom.”

“End of discussion.”

She looked at the table to see if anyone would dare challenge her. No one did.

“So... Me and Gary are gonna study at his house tonight,” Sam said.
“That’s cool, right?”

“No, not cool.”

“What? Why not?’

“Why do you think? Am I speaking Chinese in this house? Until we know Pavel is okay, no one leaves.”

“This is such bullshit!”

“Language,” George said absently.

“So we’re under house arrest? Just because Jim’s friend got lost on the way home from—“

“What, this is Pavel’s fault?!“ Jim asked, outraged.

“Sam, take that back.”

“No!”

“You’re just pissed off ‘cause you wanna hang out with Hikaru.”

Sam shot him an appalled look.

“Hikaru?” George asked.

“Who is Hikaru?” Winona asked.

“His new boyfriend,” Jim smirked.

“You are such a douchebag, Jim!”

“Language!”

Sam got up and stormed away from the table.

“You like that ice cream, huh?” the diner man asked. Spock’s mouth twitched. “Smile looks good on ya.”

It disappeared.

“You know, smile?” He grinned broadly, and Spock imitated the foreign gesture, but it came out looking plastic, sharp.

He ate more ice cream. It was strawberry. He had no clue what a strawberry was, but he would not be averse to trying one.

There was a knock at the door, and he tensed up immediately.

“Alright. You just sit tight. Whoever it is, I’ll tell ‘em to go away real quick, alright?” He took the dishrag off his shoulder and dried his hands with it, setting it on the counter.

He goes to answer the door and Spock’s Vulcan hearing picks up a hushed conversation between him and the social worker who had arrived far earlier than expected. Who Spock hadn’t been informed was coming.

He has a clear view through the kitchen window as the woman pulls out a silenced pistol and shoots Benny Hammond straight through the chest.

He starts to run.

Jim sneaks out to the garage to get his bike and runs into Hikaru

loitering under Sam's window. He rolls his eyes and files away the information for later use.

It isn't long before he and the other boys arrive at the line of police tape at the edge of the woods and park their bikes there, slipping under the tape. They set out, each with a walkie talkie in hand and tuned to channel six.

Stay put. Yeah right. As if they could just sit on their hands while their friend was missing, lost god knows where. They were going to find him, and then the police would see. That would be the last time that anybody ever underestimated them.

It was about an hour later and dusk had turned fully to night and it started raining and they all had their flashlights out when Bones said, "I think we should turn back."

"What, are ye scared?"

"No, I'm just being realistic. We don't wanna get lost too, do we?"

"You're being a big sissy, is what you are."

"Did you ever think that maybe Pavel went missing because he ran into something bad? And we're going to the exact same spot where he was last seen? And we have no weapons or anything?"

"Bones, you're making it worse," Jim said.

"I'm just saying! Does this seem smart to you? 'Cause it does not to me."

"Hey, quiet. Quiet," Jim said, holding an arm out to stop his friends. "Did you guys hear that?"

There was something rustling. They whirled around, searching, until their flashlight beams lighted on a drenched thirteen-year-old in an oversized shirt.

2. The Weirdo on Maple Street

Spock was sitting in a basement, wearing the one called Jim's jacket.

"Is there a number we can call for your parents?" he asked.

"Are you a mutant?" Bones asked.

"Did ye run away?" Scotty.

"Are you in some kind of trouble?" Jim.

"Is that blood?" Scotty pointed to a stain on his shirt.

"Stop it, you're freaking him out," Jim finally said.

"He's freaking me out," Scotty huffed.

"I think he's deaf," Bones said. He clapped his hands in his face, and Spock flinched. "Oh. Not deaf."

"That's enough, alright? He's just scared and cold," Jim said.

Thunder cracked, and Spock winced as if pained. Jim walked over to a laundry basket and dug around in it, pulling some clothes. "Here, these are clean."

Spock took the clothes, shrugged off the jacket, and reached down to pull off his shirt, to be met with shouting and exclaiming from the other boys, telling him to stop.

"See over there? That's the bathroom. Privacy. Get it?" Jim asked. The other boys had turned their backs completely, deciding that just averting their eyes wasn't good enough.

Spock looked confused, but obediently took the clothes and went into the bathroom. Jim tried to close the door behind him, but Spock thrust a hand out, stopping it.

"You don't want it closed?"

“No.”

“You can speak,” he smiled. “Okay, well, how about we just keep the door... like this. Is that better?” He left it cracked open an inch.

“This is mental,” Scotty said.

“At least he can talk,” Jim justified.

“All he said was no. A three-year-old could do more.”

“He tried to get naked. Is no one else disturbed by that?” Bones asked. “There’s something seriously wrong with him. Wrong in the head. I bet he escaped from Riverside Lab.”

“The lab?” Jim asked.

“Yeah. I bet he’s some mutant experiment of theirs. I bet the government will be looking for him. We should have never brought him here.”

“So you just wanted to leave him out in that storm?” Jim asked.

“Yes! We went out to find Pavel, not another problem.”

“I think we should tell your mom,” Scotty said.

“Yeah.”

“Who’s crazy now?” Jim laughed.

“How is that crazy?”

“We weren’t supposed to be out tonight, remember?”

“So?”

“So, if I tell my mom and she tells your mom and your mom—“

“Shite.”

“Our houses become Alcatraz,” Bones said glumly.

“And we never get to find Pavel,” Jim said. “Alright. So here’s the plan: He sleeps here tonight.”

“You’re letting a mutant—!”

“Just listen!” he said. “In the morning, he sneaks around my house, goes to the front door and rings my doorbell. My mom will answer and know exactly what to do. She’ll send him back to the lab or wherever he came from. And then we’re home free. Tomorrow night, we can go back out, and this time, we find Pavel.”

The other two exchanged uneasy glances.

Jim built Spock a blanket fort and gave him a sleeping bag.

“Hey, um, I never asked your name,” he said.

He did not want a repeat of what had happened at the diner. He did not want to be just a number, the label they had given him. He did not want to be *eleven*.

“Spock,” he said.

“Spock,” Jim repeated, trying it out. “Okay. Well, my name’s Jim. It’s short for James, but nobody calls me that.”

“Jim,” Spock said.

“Can I ask you something?”

Spock nodded.

“Okay, um. Your ears are wei—pointed. Are you a mutant?”

He shook his head.

“What, then? An alien?”

A nod.

“You didn’t come from the lab, did you? Riverside Lab?”

Spock hesitated.

“Did you run away?” Jim asked.

He nodded.

“Was it bad there?”

Again, a nod.

“Okay.” He swallowed. “Okay. Well, whatever happened, my mom will know what to do. She’ll make sure you’re safe, okay? I won’t let anything bad happen to you.”

Spock searched his eyes, trying to decide if he was telling the truth or not. Jim had to look away. “Well. I guess that’s that then. Goodnight, Spock.”

He dropped the cover of the blanket fort and turned out the light.

“Breakfast is ready,” Aurelan said, setting down two plates.

“Oh, be careful the poster,” Joyce said, moving it out of the way. They had stayed up all night, crying and going through old photo albums, looking for the perfect photo of Pavel to use. Today they would have to go down to the copy place and run off as many copies as they could, then hang them all around town.

“I can’t eat,” Joyce said.

“You have to eat, Mom,” Aurelan said.

“Listen, the Xerox places opens in like thirty minutes.”

“Yeah?”

“And I don’t want you to go down alone—“

“Mom, I told you, I’ve got it.”

“—so I’m gonna have Winona take you, ‘cause I should be here in case the phone rings.”

She closed her eyes, knowing her mom wouldn’t budge on this.

“Okay.”

“We need to make, what, 200, 300 copies? How much is a copy?”

“Okay, Mom, Mom—“

“Ten cents? Ten... If we—“

“Mom!” Aurelan put a hand on hers. “You can’t get like this, okay?”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s okay.”

The doorbell rang, and Joyce put out her newly lit cigarette, rushing to open it and let Pike in. “Finally! We’ve been waiting six hours,” she cried.

“I know. I came as soon as I could,” he said. “We’ve been searching all night. Went all the way to Cartersville.”

“And?”

“Nothing.”

She put a hand to her mouth.

“Flo says you got a phone call?”

“Oh. Yeah.” She led him to the destroyed phone. He inspected the burned-out receiver.

“Storm barbecued this pretty good,” he said.

“The storm?”

“What else?”

“You’re saying that that’s not weird?”

“No, it’s weird,” he conceded, putting it back on the hook.

“Can we, like, trace who made the call? Contact the—“

“No, it doesn’t work like that,” he said. “Now, uh, you’re sure it was Pavel? Because Flo said you just heard some breathing.”

“No. It was him. It was Pavel,” she said. “And he was scared. And then something—“

“It was probably just a prank call. It was somebody trying to scare you.”

“Who would do that?”

“Well, this thing’s been on TV. It brings out all the crazies, you know. False leads, prank calls...”

“No, Pike, it was not a prank. It was him.”

“Joyce.”

“Come on, how about a little trust here? What, you think I’m—I’m making this up?”

“I’m not saying you’re making it up. All I’m saying is it’s an emotional time for you.”

“And you think I don’t know my own son’s breathing?!”

Stillness.

“You hear from Ivan yet?”

“No.”

“It’s been long enough. I’m having him checked out.”

“Oh, come on! You’re wasting your time!”

The breakfast table was dead silent. Jim discreetly stuffed a frozen waffle into his jacket pocket, and ate another at the speed of light. His mother eyed him.

“Slow down, Jim. That’s disgusting,” Sam said.

“Do a lot of studying last night?” he asked casually.

“Yeah, actually, I did.” He didn’t break his cool for even a second.

“What was your test on again? Human anatomy?”

He kicked him under the table, and Jim kicked right back.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Winona asked.

“Nothing,” they said simultaneously.

Spock was sitting cross-legged in the blanket fort, fiddling with a piece of technology he had found, when Jim pulled back the cover and crouched next to him.

“Hey, you found my supercomm. Pretty cool, right? I talk to my friends with it. Mostly Bones, ‘cause he lives so close. Signal’s pretty weak,” he said almost apologetically.

Spock looked up at him with warm brown eyes, and Jim's face reddened. He dug into his pocket and fished out the waffle. "Got you breakfast."

Spock took it gratefully and began to eat.

"So listen, this is gonna sound a little weird, but I just need you to go outside. Then go to the front door and ring the doorbell. My mom will answer and you'll tell her that you're lost and that you need help. But whatever you do, you can't tell her about last night or that you know me. Understand?"

Spock chewed thoughtfully.

"Really, it's no big deal. We'll just pretend to meet each other again. And my mom, she'll know who to call."

So that Jim and his family could be shot like the man in the diner had been? So that more people could die trying to help him?

"No."

"No?"

"No."

"No, you don't want my mom to get help?"

Spock shook his head.

"You're in trouble, aren't you?" he asked. "Who... Who are you in trouble with?"

"Bad."

"Bad? Bad people?"

Spock looked at him, and that said volumes. He nodded, just slightly.

“They want to hurt you? The bad people?”

Spock pantomimed a gun being held to his head, and then to Jim’s chest. “Understand?”

He biked in the general direction of the school until he was sure his mom had left and then he biked right back home.

Spock looked nice wearing his clothes, he decided. They were the same size, the same clothes, but on Spock the dark colors looked different somehow. Edgier, fancier, somewhere in between there.

He was looking around the empty house in wonder. “This is my livingroom. It’s mostly just for watching TV. Nice, right? It’s a 22-inch. That’s, like, ten times bigger than Bones’.”

But Spock had already moved on, going over to the mantle and inspecting the family pictures.

“That’s my brother Sam. And those are my parents.” A thought occurred to him. “What are your parents like? Is your home planet close to here?”

Spock continued walking slowly around the room.

“That’s our lazyboy. It’s where my dad sleeps,” he said. “You can try it if you want.”

Spock sat carefully in the strange-looking chair.

“Trust me?” Jim asked. He nodded. Jim pulled the lever, and the chair rocked back, the footrest extending. Spock braced at the waving motion.

“Fun, right?” Jim asked, grinning. Spock nodded.

Jim set his favorite Yoda action figure on the table and spoke in a deep, scratchy voice. “Ready are you? What knows you of ready?”

Spock was looking at him like he had grown two heads.

“His name’s Yoda. He can use the Force to move things with his mind, like this.” Jim shoved the action figures across the table, sending them scattering. “Oh, this is my dinosaur, Rory. Look, he has a speaker in his mouth so he can roar.”

Spock went over to inspect the knick knacks sitting on his dresser and Jim abandoned the toy. “These are all my science fair trophies. We got first every year. Except for last year when we got third. Mr. Clarke said it was totally political.”

And then Spock saw the picture of all them, and his eyes went huge and dark. He placed a finger on the image of Pavel.

“You know Pavel?” Jim asked. “Did you see him? Last night? On the road?”

A car pulled into the driveway.

“We gotta go!” Jim grabbed Spock by the wrist and lead him down the stairs hurriedly, only to get halfway there and see Winona already inside the house, right in front of them. Her back was turned as she shut the door behind her.

Jim and Spock rushed back up the stairs.

“George? Is that you?” Winona asked. She could’ve sworn she had heard something.

“Just me Mom!” Jim called, practically dragging Spock along the upstairs hallways.

“Jim? What are you doing home?”

“One second!”

He rushed into his room and stopped just short of slamming the door shut. He opened the closet.

“In here. Please, you have to get in, or my mom, she’ll find you. Do you understand?” he asked. “I won’t tell her about you. I promise.”

“Promise?”

“It means something that you can’t break. Ever.”

“Jim?” Winona called.

“Please?” he asked.

Spock looked at him warily, then walked into the closet. He was about to say something when Jim slammed the door shut, leaving him in the dark.

“Pop!”

Spock was being dragged, kicking, by two guards in all white clothing. He was sobbing and twisting in their arms.

“Papa!” He tried wrenching around to catch sight of his father, just standing there, placid. “Papa! No! Papa!”

They turned the corner and there it was, the little room with the tiled floor. And Spock was screaming, an unending chorus of nonononono and they tossed him in and closed the door, leaving him in the dark.

Jim shifted uncomfortably under Winona’s gaze. “I just... I don’t feel good. I woke up and my head, it hurt really bad, and my throat was all scratchy and I wanted to tell you, but the last time I told you I was sick you made me go to school anyway, and—“

“Jim.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m not mad at you.”

“No?”

“No, of course not. All this that’s been going on with Pavel, I can’t imagine what it’s been like for you. I just... I want you to feel like you can talk to me. I never want you to feel like you have to hide anything from me. I’m here for you. Okay?”

He nodded numbly.

A thud sounded from upstairs, and he swore mentally.

“Is there someone else here?” Winona asked.

“No,” he said.

“Spock? Spock, is everything okay?” he asked, flinging open the closet door. Spock was curled up in a ball on the ground, hugging his knees to his chest, tear tracks clearly visible on his face.

“Jim,” he said brokenly.

“Are you okay?”

He nodded shakily.

“Are you sure?”

“Promise.”

Pike stepped into Benny’s Burgers along with his two officers. The place smelled of death and a body left to rot. Benny sat at one of the tables, bullet hole in his temple and a pistol in his hand.

“Suicide?” Nogura asked.

“Looks like it,” Pike said.

“Missing kid, suicide—you must feel like a big city cop again, huh

Chief?” Komack said.

“I mostly dealt with strangers back then. Benny was my friend.”

Scotty and Bones stared at the alien sitting cross-legged on Jim’s bed.

“Are you out of your mind?” Bones asked.

“Just listen to me.”

“You are out of your mind!”

“He knows about Pavel.”

“What do you mean, he knows about Pavel?” Scotty asked.

Jim picked up the picture of them all at the science fair. “He pointed at him. At his picture. He knew he was missing, I could tell.”

“You could tell?” Scotty asked.

“Just think about it. Do you really think it was a coincidence that we found him on Mirkwood, the same place where Pavel disappeared?”

“That is weird.”

“And he said bad people are after him. I think maybe these bad people are the same ones that took Pavel. I think he knows what happened to him.”

“Then why doesn’t he tell us?” Bones asked.

They all looked over at the strange alien and crossed the few feet it took to be within talking range. “Do you know where he is?”

Bones slammed a fist in his hand. “*Do you know where he is?*”

“Stop it, you’re scaring him!”

“He should be scared!” Bones said. “If you know where he is, tell us.”

He barely waited half a second before turning back to Jim. “This is nuts. We have to take him to your mom.”

“No! Spock said telling any adult puts us all in danger.”

“What kind of danger?” Scotty asked.

“His name is Spock?”

“Jim, what kind of danger?”

“Danger danger.” He did the same thing that Spock had, making his hand into a gun and touching Scotty’s forehead, who looked terrified. When he made to do the same thing to Bones, the other boy slapped his hand away.

“No, no, no! We’re going back to Plan A. We’re telling your mom.”

He brushed past his friends to the door and then suddenly froze, unable to take another step, unable to move, unable to blink.

“No,” Spock said.

“Just doesn’t make sense, Chief.”

“You notice anything odd about him the past few weeks?” Pike asked.

“No, we’re fixin’ to go fishing down the Etowah next Sunday. I mean, he was looking forward to it. I know that.”

“He got any enemies you might know about? I mean, people who might not want him around?”

“The exes didn’t like him much. That’s for sure, but...” He shook his head and puffed on his cigarette. “Nah.”

“When was the last time you saw him?”

“Yesterday. Lunch, same as always.”

“Just you and the boys?”

“Yep,” he said. “Me and Henry and... Well, there was this kid. No kid did this.”

“A kid? What are you talking about?”

“At lunch. There was this boy that was trying to steal food out of Benny’s kitchen. Can you imagine that?”

“This kid,” Pike said. “What’d he look like?”

“Well, he was about yea high. You know, tiny like. I didn’t get a good look at him, though. He was back in the kitchen.”

Komack reappeared with a missing child poster in hand. “He look like this?”

“Oh, no, that’s Ivan’s missing kid. No. This was a different kid. This one had really short hair. I mean, it was buzzed nearly down to the scalp.”

“Let’s forget about the haircut. If this kid had a buzzcut, could it be Ivan’s kid?”

“Well, I didn’t get a good look at him. About the right height, though. I mean, could’ve been. Yeah, that’s... Could’ve been.”

“Something wrong with the meatloaf?” Winona asked.

“Oh, no, I had two bologna sandwiches for lunch,” Scotty said. “Don’t know why.”

“Me too,” Bones said with the fakest smile.

“It’s delicious, Mom,” Sam said.

“Thank you, sweetie.”

“So, there’s this special assembly thing tonight for Pavel at the school field. Gary’s driving,” Sam said.

“Why am I just now hearing about this?”

“I thought you knew.”

“I told you, I don’t want you out after dark until Pavel is found.”

“I know, I know, but it’d be super weird if I’m not there. I mean, everyone’s going.”

She sighed. “Just... be back by 10:00. Why don’t you take the boys too?”

“No!” they all cried.

“Don’t you think you should be there? For Pavel?” she asked.

Jim choked on milk as he saw Spock walking down the stairs, and Scotty slammed his fists on the table to divert Winona’s attention.

“Sorry,” he said. “Spasm.”

“Hey, you think Earl really saw Pavel?” Komack asked during the search that night. “I mean, what’s he doing with a shaved head? And stealing food from Benny?”

“Tell you what. When we find him, we’ll ask,” Pike said.

“Can’t ask a corpse questions,” Nogura said.

A whistle blew shrilly in the distance, and they went running towards it.

“What do you got?”

“Not sure. Maybe nothing,” Mr. Clarke said. “I found this. In there.”

He showed them a scrap of cloth and a small tunnel, not big enough for an adult to fit through, but maybe a kid.

“No way a kid crawls through there,” Nogura said.

Pike shone his light down it. “I don’t know. A scared enough one might.”

“His brother said he was good at hiding,” Mr. Clarke said.

They followed the underground path of the tunnel, tracing its route straight to the military research base.

“Spock?” Jim called, leading his friends down into the basement. “No adults. Just us and some meatloaf.”

He cast a wary glance at Jim’s companions from within the blanket fort.

“Don’t worry. They won’t tell anyone about you. They promise. Right?”

“Aye, we never would’ve upset you if we knew ye had superpowers.”

Jim punched him in the leg from his crouched position. “What Scotty is trying to say is that they were just scared... earlier. That’s all.”

“We just wanted to find our friend,” Bones said.

“Friend?” Spock asked.

“Yeah. Friend. Pavel?”

“What is ‘friend’?”

“Okay, is he serious?” Bones asked. Scotty shrugged. Drawing on an unknown well of long-suffering, he explained, “A friend is—“

“Is someone that you’d do anything for,” Jim said.

“You talk to them about your interests, like science and fixin’ things,” Scotty said.

“And they never break a promise,” Jim said.

“Especially when there’s spit,” Bones said.

“Spit?” Spock asked.

“A spit swear means—“ he spit into his hand, “—you never break your word.” He clasped Scotty’s hand and shook it. “It’s a bond.”

“That’s super important, because friends... they tell each other things. Things that parents don’t know,” Jim said. Spock eyed him, knowing what he was asking for and unsure if he could give it.

“What’s the hobgoblin doing now?” Bones muttered as Spock took a decorative mirror off the wall and set it down on the game table. He picked up a gamepiece and inspected it.

“Pavel,” he said.

“He’s using his superpowers,” Scotty nudged Jim, who nodded. Bones rolled his eyes.

Jim took the seat next to Spock. “Did you see him? On Mirkwood? Do you know where he is?”

Spock put Pavel’s piece down in the center of the mirror. “Hiding.”

“Pavel is hiding?” Jim asked.

Spock nodded.

“From the bad men?”

He shook his head.

“Then from who?”

Spock placed the Demogorgon piece on the mirror.

3. Holly doesn't exist and this chapter has no title

Notes for the Chapter:

There is some way underage drinking in this

Gary had been sitting by the pool, debating leaving Sam to his own bad decisions at Hikaru's stupid party. Everyone but him had gone in by then. He had cut his hand using a knife to open a beer bottle earlier, and now he was messing with the bandage, trying to decide how good a friend he was going to be when Sam was being such a shitty one.

A drop of blood fell in the water.

It happened so fast he didn't even know it was happening.

He was lying on his back on cold ground, glasses smashed and nose bleeding. He discarded the ruined glasses and stood up.

"Hello?"

He was in some... place. There was a wall and a floor made of cool cement. Strange-looking vines crept up everywhere, and white ash was drifting down like snowfall.

"Sam?" he called. "Sam!"

There was a being.

Gary screamed, and the monster growled. He tore at the vines, desperately searching for a way out.

There. A ladder.

It was then that he recognized where he was. The bottom of the pool, only it had no water.

Or maybe it did have water and Gary was dead and this was what

death was like.

He scrabbled up the ladder with all the speed and force he could muster, screaming all the way. He had just reached the top when—

When he was pulled back down and killed with one final shriek.

Sam crept into the house and instantly a light flicked on and Winona was marching towards him.

“Jesus, you scared me,” he said.

“Oh, I scared you?”

“I know, I should have called.”

“Where have you been? We agreed on 10:00.”

“After the assembly, some people wanted to get something to eat. I didn’t think it’d be a big deal.”

“You didn’t think to call me and let me know? With everything that’s been going on?”

“I didn’t realize how late it was, okay? I’m sorry, Mom. What more do you want?”

“Hey, wait,” she said, stopping him on the stairs. “Whose sweatshirt is that?”

“...Hikaru’s.”

“Hikaru’s. Is Hikaru your boyfriend now?”

“What? No! It was just cold, so I borrowed his sweatshirt. It’s not a big deal.” He moved to continue up the stairs.

“Sam?” she asked.

“What?”

“You can talk to me. You can talk to me. Whatever happened.”

“Nothing. Happened.”

“Sam.” She could clearly see where his mascara had run, but sure, nothing had happened.

“Nothing happened,” he repeated. “Can I please go?”

Winona looked at him sadly, and Sam took that as his queue to leave.

“Pavel? Pavel? Sweetheart, can you hear me?” Joyce asked softly. But not soft enough to avoid waking Aurelan. “Pavel, please...”

Aurelan threw a shirt on and ran into Pavel’s room. Her mom sat surrounded by a myriad of lightbulbs.

She was talking to one of them.

“It’s me. Just talk to me. Talk to me.”

“Mom?”

“Aurelan!” she whirled. “Come here.”

“Mom, what is this? What’s going on?” SHe sat down on the bed next to her, and she took her hands for comfort.

“It’s Pavel. It’s Pavel, he’s—he’s trying to talk to me.”

“He’s trying to talk to you?”

“Yes. Through—through the lights.”

She shook her head. “Mom—“

“I know. I know. Just watch,” she said. She looked wild-eyed, manic.

“Pavel, your sister’s here. Can you show her what you showed me, baby? Ple—Did you see that?!”

“It’s the electricity, Mom, it’s the same thing that fried the phone.”

“No! It is not the electricity, Aurelan. Something is going on here! Yesterday, the wall—“

“What about the wall?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know!”

“Mom, first the lights, then the wall?”

“I just know that Pavel is here.”

She sighed. “No, Mom.”

“Maybe if I get more lamps—“

“No, Mom. You don’t need more lamps. You need to stop this, okay? He is just lost. People are looking for him, and they’re going to find him. This isn’t helping.”

“Okay. Okay. I’m sorry. Sorry.”

“Can you do me a favor, Mom? Can you just try and get some sleep?”

“Yeah. Yeah, sure.”

“Alright. I’ll go make breakfast.”

“Okay. I just need to sit here for a minute.”

Aurelan left the room, and Joyce looked around frantically and whispered, “Pavel?”

“It’s simple. We just tell our parents we have science club after school. That’ll give us at least a few hours for Operation Mirkwood,”

Jim said.

“You seriously think that hobgoblin knows where Pavel is?” Bones asked, as if Spock wasn’t sitting on a couch ten feet away.

“Just trust me on this, okay?” Jim said. “Did you get the supplies?”

“Yeah,” Bones said, pulling supplies pilfered from his dad’s closet out of his bookbag and setting them on the table. “Binoculars, from ‘Nam. Army knife, also from ‘Nam. Hammer, camouflage bandana, and the wrist rocket.”

“You’re gonna take out the Demogorgon with a slingshot?” Scotty asked.

“It’s a wrist rocket. And yes, I would, if the Demogorgon were real, which it is not,” he said. “But if there is something out there, I’m gonna shoot it in the eye and blind it.”

Jim sighed. “Scotty, what did you get?”

He pulled out three flasks. “I brought us alcohol from my dad’s stash. If we’re gonna fight a monster, then we’re gonna need it.”

“You’re gonna get arrested one day,” Bones said.

“Aye, only if I’m caught,” he said, taking a swig. “And besides, why do we even need weapons anyway? We have Spock.”

“He held one person still. For thirty seconds,” Bones said.

“With his mind. Are ye kidding me? That’s bloody crazy, man,” he said. “Imagine what all else he can do. Like...”

He lifted up a model Millennial Falcon and held it in front of Spock, who was fiddling with the supercomm again. “I bet he can make this fly. Okay, concentrate.”

He dropped the toy starship. Spock watched, unimpressed.

“Okay, one more time. Use your powers, okay?”

He dropped the starship again.

Jim snatched it off the floor. “He’s not a dog.”

“Boys! Time for school!” Winona called. Scotty and Bones threw on their jackets and bags, feet thumping up the stairs.

“Just stay down here, okay? Don’t make any noise,” he said. “You know those power lines?”

“Power lines?”

“The ones behind my house?”

“Yes.”

“Meet us there, after school.”

“After school?”

“Yeah, 3:15. Ah,” he took off his watch and slipped it on Spock’s wrist. “When the numbers read 3-1-5, meet us there.”

“There it is. The Emerald City,” Nogura said.

“I heard they make space weapons in there,” Komack said.

“Space weapons?”

“Yeah. Like Reagan’s Star Wars? I guess we’re gonna blow the Russkies to smithereens.”

“Hey, can I help you?” the guard at the gate asked when they pulled up.

“Yeah. We’re here for a tour,” Pike said.

“We don’t give tours.”

“Okay. A quick look around, then.”

“You have to get clearance for that. You can contact Rick Schaeffer at the Department of Energy.”

“Maybe you saw it on TV. We got a local kid that’s missing. We have reason to believe he might have snuck in here.”

“Like I said, you’ll have to speak to Mr. Schaeffer.”

Pike took his hat off and set it on the dash. “What’s your name?”

“Patrick.”

“Patrick, I got a panicked mayor, and I got reporters breathing down my neck, and I got a very upset mother. Now, I know the kid’s not in there, but I gotta check off this box. Patrick, would you do me a favor? Would you speak to your boss and see what you can swing for us?” he said. “I’d really appreciate it. I’m talking ten minutes, tops.”

Spock wandered the house. He ate a few snacks that wouldn’t be missed. He sat in the lazyboy. He learned how to work the TV.

He flipped through the channels. The president speaking. A children’s cartoon. An antiques auction. A dog show.

He was sitting at the table in a testing room. It was tiled, soundproof, bulletproof, everything-proof, with telepathic dampeners lacing the walls. A glass window sat high on one wall so several scientists and Papa could observe him.

They had set a dog on the table. It was small white and had curly, fluffy hair. It was very affectionate, and come right up to Spock and asked to be petted.

He wasn’t allowed to leave the room until he killed it with his mind.

He had not bathed or changed or used real bathroom facilities in four days. It was undignified, humiliating, but overall tolerable. It was the hunger and the cold and the thirst that was getting to him.

The dog whined a lot. It didn't like being trapped in here either. Spock didn't blame him.

It liked to curl up on his lap a lot and he would stroke it. Its thoughts were pleasant, simple, free of the complex worries of sentient beings. It was like a salve on Spock's mind. It knew only pain and pleasure, need and satisfaction, instincts and drives and primitive wants. It didn't know what an ethical dilemma was. It never would.

Spock petted the dog, and he wondered how long this would last.

“And you think this missing boy might have crawled through there?”

“Well, that was the idea,” Pike said.

“Yeah, I just don’t see how that’d be possible. We’ve got over one hundred cameras. Every square inch covered, plus all my guys. No one breaks in here. Certainly not some kid.”

“Those cameras. You keep the tapes?”

“If you don’t mind me asking, what do you guys do in here?” Pike asked, while their ‘guide’ led them at a brisk pace.

“You’re asking the wrong guy,” he said.

“Staying one step ahead of the Russians?”

“I expect. Something like that.”

“Who’s in charge here?”

“That’d be Dr. Richard Daystrom.”

“And he builds the space lasers?” Komack asked.

“Space lasers?”

“Ignore him.”

They arrived in the security room and viewed the tapes.

“This is the night of the sixth and seventh?” Pike asked.

“Yep.”

The tape stopped. “Is that it?”

“Like I said, we would have seen him.”

“The night of the seventh, we had a search party out for Pavel. You remember anything about that night?”

“Not much to remember. We called the search off,” Komack said.

“Cause of the storm,” Pike said.

“Yeah, a lot of rain that night.”

“You see any rain on that tape?”

“What are you thinking?” Nogura asked.

“I don’t know. But they’re lying.”

Spock padded up the stairs on cloud-quiet feet. He pushed open the first door that he found, and walked in hesitantly.

Sam’s room.

He pressed a button on a small machine and strange music played. He turned it down quickly.

He decided it was not unpleasant.

He turned it off and moved on, finding a bulletin board full of pictures of Sam and his friends, all laughing and having a good time.

His eyes were drawn to the pictures of Gary.

“So. Do you think Spock was born with his powers or do you he acquired them later on somehow?” Scotty asked. They were standing out behind the school, picking out rocks to use for the slingshot.

“He’s not a superhero. He’s a mutant,” Bones said.

“A, he’s an alien, not a mutant, and b, so what if he was? The X-Men are mutants, are weirdos, and they’re still amazing.”

“Ooh, Spock’s amazing now, is he?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Jim, seriously? You look at him like you’re ten seconds away from proposing marriage.”

“Shut up!”

“Yeah, shut up,” Finnegan said, sauntering up with his friend. “What are you losers doing back here?”

“Probably looking for their missing friend,” his crony supplied.

“That’s not funny. It’s serious. He’s in danger,” Scotty said.

“I hate to break it to you, Tweedle dee, but he’s not in danger. He’s dead. That’s what my dad says.”

“Whatever. You guys aren’t worth our time,” Jim said, intending to shove past them coolly, but Finnegan tripped him on the way by and he cracked his chin on a rock, blood spilling instantly.

Finnegan and his friend laughed and walked off.

Pike and Nogura went to the library and began meticulously scanning through every news article they could find on the Riverside Lab.

It wasn't good.

RIVERSIDE LAB BLOCKS INVESTIGATION

ALLEGED EXPERIMENTS, ABUSE

MKULTRA EXPOSED

DR. RICHARD DAYSTROM NAMED IN LAWSUIT

AMANDA GRAYSON SUING: "THEY TOOK MY SON."

"Hey, man," Hikaru said as Aurelan walked by. "Nicole here was telling us about your work."

"We've heard great things," Carol said.

"Yeah, sounds cool," Tommy added.

"And we'd just love to take a look. You know, as connoisseurs of art."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Aurelan said.

Tommy ripped her bag off her, tossing it to Hikaru.

"Man, she is totally trembling. She must really have something to hide," he said. He unzipped the bag and pulled out a stack of freshly-developed photos. "Here we go."

"Oh, man."

"Let me see."

“Dude!”

“Yeah, this isn’t creepy at all.”

“I was looking for my brother,” Aurelan said.

“No. No, this is called stalking,” Hikaru said.

And that was when Sam walked up.

“Here’s the leading man,” Tommy said.

“What?”

“This creep was spying on us last night,” Carol said. She passed off a photo. “He was probably gonna save this one for later.”

Sam looked at the photo, zoomed in on a window, his own back to it as he took off his shirt. He felt sick.

“See, you can tell that she knows it was wrong, but that’s the thing about perverts. It’s hardwired into them. They just can’t help themselves,” Hikaru said. He tore the photos in his hands into shreds. “So we’ll just have to take away her toy.”

“Hikaru—“ Aurelan said.

“No, it’s okay. Here you go. Take it.” He held out the camera at arm’s length, and Aurelan moved to do just that when he dropped it and it shattered into a million pieces.

Spock walked out to the power lines and checked Jim’s watch to make sure it was the exact minute he had been told. 3-1-5. Yes.

No one else was here.

He was standing by a chain-link fence, like the type around the lap.

He squeezed his eyes shut and he wasn't sure for how long but then Jim was there, Jim and his friends.

"Spock! Hey, Spock, are you okay?"

He nodded. Jim patted the seat of his bike. "Hop on. We only have a few hours."

Jim got on his bike and Spock sat behind him, arms around his waist, and the kids took off.

It was in the woods later when they were walking side by side.

"Why did they hurt you?" Spock asked.

"Huh?"

He pointed to the injury on Jim's chin.

"Oh, that. Uh. I just fell at recess."

"Jim..."

"Yeah?"

"Friends tell the truth."

He sighed. "I was tripped by this mouth-breather, Finnegan."

"Mouth-breather?"

"Yeah, you know, a dumb person. A knucklehead."

"Knucklehead?"

"I don't know why I didn't just tell you. Everyone at school knows. I just didn't want you to think I was such a wastoid, you know?"

"Jim."

“Yeah?”

“I understand.”

He nodded. “Okay, cool. Cool.”

Spock gave him a slight smile and Jim returned it.

“I don’t know, Chief,” Nogura said.

“You don’t know what?”

“This lady, Amanda Grayson, she sounds like a real nut to me. Her kid was taken for LSD mind control experiments? She’s been discredited. Claim was thrown out—“

“Okay, forget about her. Take a look at this. Dr. Richard Daystrom.”

“Who?”

“Daystrom. He runs Riverside Lab.”

“Okay,” Nogura said dubiously.

“You don’t find that interesting?”

“Not really. He was involved in some hippie crap back in the day, so what?”

“No, this isn’t hippie crap. This is CIA-sanctioned research.”

“Doesn’t mean he had anything to do with our kid.”

“Come on. Look at that photo. Hospital gowns, all of ‘em. Now, that piece of fabric that the teacher found by the pipe. That sure looked like a hospital gown to me. Am I wrong?”

“I don’t know, Chief.”

“Come on, man. Work with me here. I’m not saying there’s some grand conspiracy, I’m just...” He sighed. “I’m saying maybe something happened. Maybe Pavel was in the wrong place at the wrong time and he saw something that he shouldn’t have.”

“It’s a reach.”

“It’s a start.”

“Here,” Spock said, coming to a stop.

“Yeah, this is where Pavel lives,” Jim said.

“Hiding.”

“No, this is where he lives. He’s missing from here. Understand?”

“What are we doing here?” Bones asked, catching up to them.

“He said he’s hiding here.”

“I swear, if we walked all the way out here for nothing—“

“That’s exactly what we did. I told you he didn’t know what the hell he was talking about.”

“Why did you bring us here?” Jim asked.

“Jim, don’t waste your time with him.”

“What do you want to do then?”

“Call the cops like we should have done yesterday!”

“We are not calling the cops!”

“Hey, lads?” Scotty said. They all quieted as a stream of vehicles with flashing lights and sirens whirred past. They ran to their bikes to follow.

They got to the river just in time to see the firemen pull a body out. A body that looked just like twelve-year-old Pavel.

“It can’t be him,” Jim breathed.

“It’s really him,” Bones said.

“Jim,” Spock said.

“Jim? Jim, what? You were supposed to help us find him alive! You said he was alive!” he shrieked. “Why would you say that? What’s wrong with you? *What is wrong with you?*”

“Jim—“

“What?!”

He shook his head. Jim stormed off, disgusted.

4. The Body

Notes for the Chapter:

I know I promised no homophobia in this fic but that's like 90% of that bully kids lines and there's only so much I can do and still have the scene make sense. So I kept precisely one homophobic comment from him and it's the final tipping point to make Jim snap

"A trooper found something. In the water that's at the quarry. Our working theory right now is that Pavel crashed his bike, made his way over to the quarry, and accidentally fell in. The earth must have given way. Joyce?" Pike asked. She was a million miles away. "Joyce? Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"No," she said. "Whoever you found is not my boy. It's not Pavel."

"Joyce."

"No, you don't understand. I talked to him a half hour ago. He was—he was here. He was talking with these." She held up a bundle of twinkle lights.

"Talking?"

"Uh-huh," she said. "One blink for yes, two for no. And—and, uh, and then I made this so he could talk to me." She gestured to the setup of Christmas lights and letters painted on the wall. "'Cause he was hiding from that—that thing."

"The thing that came out of the wall?" Pike asked. "The thing that chased you?"

"Yeah."

"Mom, come on, please. You gotta stop this," Aurelan said.

“No, maybe he’s—he’s—it’s after him! He’s in danger, we have to find him!”

“What exactly was this thing?” Pike asked. “It was some kind of animal, you said?”

“Uh, yes it was—it was almost like a mountain lion, but it wasn’t. It—it had this pattern of—of diamonds on its back.”

Aurelan walked away.

“It had diamonds on its back?” Pike asked. Joyce kept repeating that, almost nervously, and Pike sat her down. “Joyce. Listen to me. Lots of parents, when they lose a kid, they think they can still see and hear them. But you have to put that stuff behind you. If you don’t, then you fall down a hole, a hole you can’t ever get out of.”

“You’re talking about grief. This is different.”

“I’m just saying—“

“I know what you’re saying, Pike. I swear to you, I know what I saw. And I’m not crazy.”

“I’m not saying that you’re crazy.”

“No, you are. And I understand, but god... I *need* you to believe me. Please.”

“Listen,” Pike said. “I think you should go down to the morgue tomorrow and see him for yourself. It’ll give you the answers that you need. But tonight, I want you to try and get some sleep, if you can.”

Static crackled from the supercomm.

“Can you *please* stop that?” Jim asked.

Spock did not.

“Are you deaf?!”

No response, just more static crackling.

“I thought we were friends, you know? And friends tell each other the truth. And they definitely don’t lie to each other. You made me think Pavel was okay, that he was still out there, but he wasn’t. He wasn’t. Maybe you thought you were helping, but you weren’t. You hurt me. Do you understand?” he asked. “What you did *sucks*. Bones was right about you. All along.”

Just a touch more static and then Spock locked onto the right thought pattern and used the supercomm as a catalyst and a high-pitched, teenaged voice started singing through the radio.

“So come on and let me know. Should I stay or should I go?”

Jim leapt up and raced over to his friend, who handed him the supercomm.

“Should I stay or should I go now? If I go there will be trouble. If I stay it will be double—“

“Pavel, is that you?! It’s Jim!” he shouted. “Do you copy? Over!”

Static and interference cut out the transmission. Spock closed his eyes in resignation.

“Was that... was it...?”

“Pavel.”

“We keep losing the signal, but you heard it, right?” Jim asked.

“Yeah. I heard a baby,” Bones said.

“What?”

“Jim, you obviously tapped into a baby monitor. It’s probably the Blackburns’ next door.”

“Did that sound like a baby to you? That was Pavel!”

“Jim—“

“Bones, you don’t understand. He spoke last night. Words! He was singing that weird song he loves. Even Spock heard him.”

“Oh, well, if the hobgoblin heard him, then I guess—“

“Are you sure you’re on the right channel?” Scotty asked.

“I don’t think it’s about that. I think—somehow—Spock’s channeling him.”

Bones turned to Scotty. “Are you actually believing this crap?”

“I dunno, I mean. Remember when Pavel fell off his bike and broke his finger? He sounded a lot like that.”

“Did you guys not see what I saw?” he asked. “They pulled Pavel’s body out of the water. He’s *dead!*”

“Well then, maybe it’s his ghost. Maybe he’s haunting us,” Scotty said.

“It’s not his ghost,” Jim said.

“And how do you know that?” Bones asked.

“I just do.”

“Then what was in that water?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “All I know is Pavel is alive. Pavel is alive! He’s out there somewhere. All we have to do is find him.”

The supercomm crackled with loud interference.

“This isn’t going to work. We need to get Spock to a stronger radio.”

“Mr. Clarke’s Heathkit ham shack,” Scotty said.

“The Heathkit’s at school. There is no way we’re gonna get the hobgoblin in there without anyone noticing. I mean, look at him.”

And so that was how they wound up giving Spock a makeover.

The ears and green-tinted skin were the biggest problems. They decided the best way to go was by having Spock cover as much skin as possible and wear pink blush on his hands and face, which Jim applied, which took forever because Spock kept jerking away whenever the brush’s touch was too light and ticklish. It made Jim laugh. Spock was not nearly as amused.

He hid his smiles.

Then came the ears. That was a much bigger problem. They were going to be indoors, it wasn’t actually that cold out, and even with those other two factors notwithstanding, hats are against the school dress code. Putting Spock in one would draw *extra* attention from the administration.

So that left wigs.

They had a very limited selection of wigs, namely: one. It was curly and blond and went just past Spock’s chin.

“He looks like a girl,” Bones said.

“No he doesn’t. The clothes counteract it,” Jim said.

“The clothes make him look mismatched. Nobody wears their hair that feminine and their clothes that masculine. No offense, but he’s clearly a guy in a wig. We aren’t gonna be foolin’ nobody,” Scotty said.

“Well, that’s the only wig we’ve got. He has to wear it,” Jim said.

Bones folded his arms. “I’ve got an idea.”

Ten minutes later, Spock walked out of Jim’s room wearing a pink dress, Winona’s old shoes, and what hopefully looked like natural makeup.

“Wow,” Scotty said. “He looks—“

“Pretty,” Jim said. “Good. Pretty good. You look pretty good.”

Bones was giving him a look, which Jim ignored. Scotty was smirking too, which Jim also ignored.

Could a guy be pretty? Was it just that he looked like a girl, and Jim liked girls, so he seemed pretty to him?

Then he remembered how Spock had looked in his baggy sweats and decided that no, Spock was just plain pretty, no matter what he was wearing.

Though he should wear skirts more often.

“This argument you and Gary had. What exactly was it about?” Nogura asked. Now it was Sam who had been called out of class for police questioning.

“It wasn’t really an argument. Gary just wanted to leave. I didn’t, so I told him to just go home.”

“Then what?”

“Then I went upstairs to put on some dry clothes.” Did his mom really have to be here for this? Had it truly been necessary to call Winona down to the school just because Sam was a minor?

“And the next day, you went back and saw a bear, you’re thinking?”

Nogura asked.

“I don’t know what it was, but I think—I think maybe it took Gary. You need to check behind Hikaru’s house—“

“We did. There’s nothing there,” Komack said. “And no sign of a bear.”

“And no car,” Nogura said.

“What?”

“Look. We figure that Gary came back last night and then he took off, went somewhere else,” Komack said.

“Has he ever talked to you about running away?” Nogura asked.
“Leaving town, maybe?”

“No. No, Gary wouldn’t do that.”

“He wasn’t maybe upset that you were spending time with this boy?
Uh, Hikaru Sulu?”

“What? No!”

“Maybe he was jealous because he saw you go up to Hikaru’s room?”
Komack asked.

His mother turned to him, and Sam said firmly, “It wasn’t like that.”

“Like what?”

“Hikaru and me, we’re just friends. We just talked.”

“Now was this before or after you changed out of your clothes?”

“Okay, remember, if anyone sees us, look sad,” Jim reminded them as he led his friends into the school.

“Attention, students and faculty. There will be an assembly to honor Pavel Chekov in the gymnasium now. Do not go to fourth period.”

Jim jiggled the handle to the storage room where Mr. Clarke kept the radio. “It’s locked.”

“What?”

“Hey, do you think you can open it? With your powers?” Scotty asked.

“Boys?”

They all turned to see Mr. Clarke rounding the corner on them.

“Assembly’s about to start.”

“We know. We’re just, y’know...” Jim said.

“Sad,” Bones said.

“Very sad,” Scotty said. “We just wanna be alone.”

“To cry,” Jim said.

“Listen. I get it. I do. I know how hard this is, but let’s just be there for Pavel, huh? And then...” He dug a key out of his pocket and tossed it to Jim. “The Heathkit is all yours for the rest of the day. What do you say?”

The kids grinned.

“I don’t believe we’ve met. What’s your name?” He asked Spock.

“Spo—“

“Spencer! He—she’s my... cousin,” Jim said. “She’s here for Pavel’s funeral.”

“Oh. Well, welcome to Riverside Middle, Spencer. I wish you were

here under better circumstances.”

“Thank you.”

“Where are you from exactly?”

“Bad place—“

“Sweden!” Scotty said.

“I have a lot of Swedish family,” Jim added.

“She hates it there. It’s too cold,” Scotty said.

“Nothin’ like the good old U.S. of A,” Bones said.

Mr. Clarke gave them a strange look, and then decided to simply ignore the exchange. “Shall we?”

“Yep!”

They allowed their favorite teacher to lead them into the gymnasium. The door banged open loudly, and four hundred heads snapped and turned to them. Their footsteps seemed unreasonably loud as they made their way across the gym in full view of everyone.

They took their seats and listened intently to the rest of the principal’s speech. Or what they could stomach of it, anyway.

“Look at these fakers,” Bones muttered to Jim. “Prolly didn’t even know his name ‘til today.”

Finnegan and his friend were laughing, whispering and giggling to themselves. Not quietly.

“Who is interested in this? This is so stupid. Ooh, he was such a great student. Oh, he’s going to leave a hole in the community.”

Jim was leaning over and glaring daggers at them. Spock peered over his shoulder.

“Mouth-breather,” he muttered. Jim turned to him in awe. How did he know? How could he possibly know that those were the same kids Jim had called mouth-breathers earlier?

The assembly ended, and the kids were dismissed, rushing off the stacked wooden bleachers in a swarm. Jim marched forward determinedly, seeking out Finnegan.

“Hey! Finnegan!” he called. The boy and his friend turned around to confront him, him and Spock. “You think this is funny?”

“What’d you say, Kirk?”

“I saw you guys laughing over there. And I think that’s a really messed up thing to do. So you better apologize.”

“Didn’t you listen to the counselor, Kirk? Grief shows itself in funny ways,” the crony said.

By now they had gathered a large audience.

“Besides, what’s there to be sad about anyway? Pavel’s in fairyland now, right? Flying around with all the other little fairies. All happy and gay!” Finnegan spat.

They started to walk away, laughing, but Jim went after them and shoved Finnegan to the ground. The entire school froze, some gasping.

Finnegan looked up at him from the ground, mania in his eyes. “You’re dead, Kirk! Dead!”

He rushed up and ran towards him but didn’t make it more than two bounds before he stopped, frozen, still as a statue in place.

His eyes held stark fear. A wet stain made its way down his pants.

“Dude, Finnegan peed himself!”

The crowd of middle schoolers howled with laughter at their peer's humiliation. Finnegan was red in the face, seething with fury, still unable to move. A smile lit up Jim's whole face, and he turned back to Spock, who wiped his nose, getting fresh blood on the sleeve of his dress.

It was only then that the school faculty seemed to notice that something was even going on.

"Hey! What's going on over here?" the principal called, marching towards them.

The kids sprinted away before they could be caught, leaving Finnegan alone in the center of the gym in his soiled pants.

Sam and Aurelan sat side by side on a bench in the funeral home, where Aurelan had been interrupted while trying to pick out a casket for her little brother. Alone.

Her mother still refused to accept that Pavel was dead. Refused to sign off on the forms that would say she recognized the body in the morgue as being her son's. She still thought he was alive and in the lights, communicating with her. She insisted that Pavel's body was not really Pavel, that it was some other kid or a fake somehow.

Which left Aurelan to handle all of the arrangements on her own at sixteen. She felt older. She felt far too old, hadn't felt like a child or even a teenager for years now. She was a high school dropout with a full-time job, a dead kid brother, and a mother who had just gone over to the wrong side of the brink of sanity.

Aurelan was the only one still holding it together.

And now Sam had come to her with one of the pictures she had taken, the shredded pieces of it patched back together with tape. It was of Gary sitting by the pool, legs dangling in the water. And something strange was behind him.

"It looks like it could be some kind of perspective distortion. But I

wasn't using the wide angle," she said. "I don't know. It's weird."

"And you're sure you didn't see anyone else out there?" Sam asked.

"No. And he was just there one second, and the next, he was just... gone. I figured he bolted."

"The cops think that he ran away," Sam said. "But they don't know Gary. And I went back to Hikaru's and I thought I... saw something. Some weird mountain lion or—I don't know what it was."

Aurelan gave him a strange look.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come here today. I'm—I'm so sorry," he said, picking up his bag and heading to leave.

"What'd it look like?" Aurelan asked quickly.

Sam paused. Turned. "What?"

"The thing you saw in the woods. What'd it look like?"

"I don't know. It was almost like it—like it had—"

"—Diamonds on its back?" Aurelan finished.

Sam's gaze turned wary. "How did you know that?"

Pike sat in a bar next to a man he knew to be an off-duty state trooper. They were both watching the big game on the television.

"Another, please," Pike said to the bartender. "And another for my, uh, friend here."

"Thanks man. Appreciate it. I'm straight though."

"So am I," Pike said, to put the man at ease. "I'm celebrating. My daughter, she won the spelling bee today."

“Is that right?”

“Yeah,” he grinned, blowing a smoke ring. “Odontalgia. That was the word. Know what it means?”

He shook his head.

“It’s a fancy name for a toothache.” He chuckled to himself. “She’s smart. Real smart. Don’t know where she gets it from. I been tryin’ to figure that out for years.”

“Your daughter, she got a name?”

“What?” he asked, with just the slightest edge of suspicion, hurriedly trying to think up a name for his make-believe daughter.

“Your daughter. What’s her name?” the trooper repeated.

“Sarah,” he said. “Her name’s Sarah.”

The man held up a bottle. “To Sarah.” Pike clinked his glass against it, and they both drank.

Time for the real conversation.

“I recognize you,” Pike said. “Are you famous or something?”

“Uh, you might have seen me on TV. I found that Chekov boy.”

“So, you on that case, or...?”

“I just saw him on patrol, you know? Dumb luck.”

“So that quarry, where they found the boy, that’s state-run, is it?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, see, that’s funny. ‘Cause I happen to know for a fact that it’s run by the Sattler Company. Frank Sattler? Decent guy, still got a couple operational quarries up in Roane.”

“Is that right?” he asked, with just a bit of an edge.

“Yeah. That’s right. So why are you lying to me, man?”

“What’s your problem?”

“I don’t have a problem. I’m just a concerned citizen.”

“Yeah? Well stick your nose someplace else. The kid is dead. End of story.” He threw a bill down on the counter and shrugged on his coat. “Thanks for ruining the game, dick.”

Pike swallowed the rest of his drink and followed him out.

And that was how he ended up punching the guy’s face in, holding him against the wall out behind the bar. He knocked the man around a little bit and then grabbed him by the front of his shirt with both fists, lifting him off the ground slightly.

“Okay. Let’s try this one more time. Who told you to be out there? *What were you doing out there?!*”

The man said nothing, glaring at him, and Pike pulled back one of his fists.

“I don’t know! I don’t know! They just told me to call it in and not let anybody get too close.”

“Get close to what?”

“The body.”

Pike went icy still. “Who do you work for? The NSA? Riverside Lab?” A sound startled him, and he whipped his head around to see a car had pulled up on the street right across from them. “Who is that?”

“You’re gonna get us both killed.”

“Who is that?”

He dropped the man, who fell to the ground in a heap, and ran towards the car, pulling out his gun and shouting as he went. The car wheeled away with a screech of its tires, and when Pike turned around, the state trooper was gone.

The boys crowded into the repurposed storage closet that served as the school's science club meeting room. Spock sat down in front of the Heathkit.

"Now what?" Scotty asked.

"He'll find him," Jim said confidently. He turned on the radio and fiddled with the instrumentation. Spock closed his eyes.

"Spock? Are you listening?" Papa asked, pulling up a chair next to him in the testing room. Spock sat curled up in a ball in his own metal chair, knees clutched to his chest and electrodes taped all over his shaved head.

"That man before you—I need you to find him."

A picture sat on the table before them.

"Hurt him?" Spock asked softly.

"No. No, I don't want you to hurt him. I want you to listen to him."

"Listen?"

"Yes. I want you to listen to what he says and repeat his words back to me. Just like we used to with those old nursery rhymes. Do you remember? Do you think you can do that for me?"

"...M-hmm."

"Good."

Spock straightened up in his chair and stared at the photo.

"Begin."

The lights cut out. A voice began saying random words over the intercom.

He was doing it.

“He’s doing it. He’s finding him!” Jim said.

“This is bloody crazy,” Scotty said.

“Calm down. He just closed his eyes,” Bones said.

The light above them flicked out, and the humans gasped. They all leaned in to peer at the radio over Spock’s shoulders. It was making a strange clanking sound, over and over.

“Mom?” Pavel’s tiny voice asked.

“No way,” Bones said incredulously.

“Mom, please...”

The humans were frantically shouting now, trying to make Pavel hear them.

“Why can’t he hear us?” Bones asked.

“I don’t know!” Jim cried.

“Mom? Mom!” he called. The kids got the impression they were only hearing half the conversation. That somehow, against all odds, Joyce was making herself heard to him. “Mom, it’s coming! ... It’s like home, but it’s so dark, it’s so dark and empty! It’s cold! Mom? Mom! ... Mom, please!”

The radio spontaneously burst into flames, and all the kids jumped and flinched back from it, except for Spock, who continued to sit calmly in front of the burning radio. Scotty, level-headed as always, went to the corner of the room and retrieved the fire extinguisher, dousing the entire table in white foam.

“Spock, are you okay?” Jim asked. Blood was dripping from his nose, he was slack-jawed and vacant-eyed. “Can you move?”

No response, just more listlessness.

“Here, help him up.” Jim and Bones dragged Spock out of the chair by his arms. They soon got him into a wheelchair and ran out of the little room, the only students in the school taking the longer, desolate paths to the doors on the wrong end of the building while the fire alarm rang.

“And you’re...?” Sam asked.

“Brightening. Enlarging,” Aurelan said.

Sam hummed in acknowledgement while Aurelan continued to work. “Did your mom say anything else? Like, where it might have gone to, or...?”

“No, just that it came out of the wall.” She removed the photo paper from the machinery and set it in the pan of fluid to develop.

“How long does this take?” Sam asked.

“Not long.”

“Have you been doing this a while? Photography, I mean?”

“Yeah,” she said. “I guess I’d rather observe people than... y’know, talk to them. I know. It’s weird.”

“No,” he said.

“No, it is,” Aurelan admitted with a quirk of her mouth. “It’s just, sometimes... people don’t really say what they’re really thinking. But you capture the right moment, it says more.”

“What was I saying?”

“What?”

“When you took my picture.”

“I shouldn’t have taken that. I’m sorry. It’s just—“

“That’s it.” Sam’s eyes zeroed in on the freshly-developed picture.
“That’s what I saw.”

It was clearly a monster, inhuman, unearthly, green, with a jagged yellow pattern on its back. It looked like it had rectangles dripping from it. Diamonds on its back.

“My mom—I thought she was crazy. ‘Cause she said that’s not Pavel’s body. That he’s still alive.”

“And if he’s alive—“

“Then Gary is too.”

“You need something, Chief?” the receptionist asked as Pike walked into the morgue.

“You’re gonna laugh. I forgot my hat,” he said sheepishly.

“Oh,” she smiled and waved him on. He strode through the corridors straight to the room that Joyce had left screaming not that long ago. The state trooper guarding it leapt to his feet and blocked the doorway.

“You can’t be back here,” he said.

“I just got off the phone with O’Bannon. He said that he needs to see you at the station? It’s some emergency.”

“What the hell are you talking about? I don’t work with O’Bannon.”

“Did I say O’Bannon? I meant...” He paused. He didn’t know any other state trooper’s names. He shrugged and decked the guy in the

face, knocking his head back into the metal door, and then hitting him again on his way down. He was out cold.

Pike pilfered his key ring off of him and unlocked the door. He crossed the room and opened a few drawers until he found the right one, sliding out the long medical table that held Pavel's body. He pulled back the sheet.

It looked like him. It looked like a dead, drowned kid.

It looked real.

He took a few steps away and ran a hand over his face. He didn't want to be wrong. If he was wrong, if he cut into that corpse and mutilated what was honest-to-god some poor dead kid's body...

He had to do this. He had to. He wasn't wrong. It was a reasonable claim, it had substantial basis, it had to be checked out.

He walked back over to the corpse and flicked his switchblade out. He held it above the kid's abdomen and faltered.

God, if it was a fake, it was one hell of a good one.

He plunged the knife in and cut.

He pulled out white stuffing.

5. The Flea and the Acrobat

Notes for the Chapter:

The bunny story comes from something that happened to a girl I go to school with. It might have been a different animal actually, maybe a chicken, I don't really remember.

The religion thing is just me projecting, you can ignore that

Zolotse is a Russian term of endearment that means “my gold”

Pike cut through the wire fence lining the facility and slunk alongside the building. A couple of scientists walked out, and he used that as his chance to slip in. He walked cautiously down the corridors, ducking into a sideroom when he heard people about to encounter him and staying pressed up against the wall until they passed.

He came across a section of the building cordoned off with a plastic sheet marked hazardous materials. It could be being used to hide something. Or there could genuinely be hazardous materials beyond this point.

He was probably going to die either way, to be honest. He tore through the seam in its center and kept moving.

The next thing he encountered was a locked door with a device off to the side that required a key card. And a little red light that indicated a camera running.

Guns cocked behind him, and Pike turned around, hands in the air.

“Forget all the cameras, buddy?” his guide from earlier asked.

“Look, Dr. Daystrom asked for me specifically, okay? How else do you think I got in here?”

The guide removed his walkie talkie from his belt. “What’s your name again?”

“It’s Chris Pike. Chief Chris Pike.”

He pressed the talk button. “Yeah, I’ve got Chris Pike—“

Chris decked him in the face, stole his gun, and thrust it into the face of the other guard, slamming him against the wall and taking his gun too. He kept the gun levelled at the guard’s face.

He had a key card pinned to his chest.

“Hey. You mind if I borrow this thing?” he asked, taking it. He swiped through the access point and shot the locking mechanism behind him.

“Drink. It’ll calm your nerves,” Ivan said, pouring a drink for Joyce. He had arrived not five minutes ago. “Help you think straight, yes?”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“I know. I know.”

“This whole time, I—I could—I could feel him. He was so close. He was—he was right there. I knew he was alive. Our hands—our hands were almost touching. Now it’s like... God, it’s like I can’t feel him anymore,” she sobbed. “Don’t look at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like how everybody is looking at me. Like I’m out of my damn mind.”

“Hey.” He placed a hand on her shoulder. “You’re not going to like this, but you need to seriously consider the possibility that all this is in your head.”

She scoffed.

“You remember your Aunt Darlene?”

“No. This isn’t like that.”

“I mean, when something happens, your mind makes up stuff to help you cope, you know? Joyce, you must accept this. There is going to be a funeral tomorrow for our little one. And you are claiming his body is a fake. That he is in the wall. How do you explain that?” Ivan asked. “It just doesn’t make sense. It doesn’t. At least go talk to a counselor or... What about Pastor Charles or someone?”

“I don’t—They can’t help.”

“Joyce. You just told me that Pavel is gone. What else is there to do?”

She put her face in her hands and took a long drink.

“Pavel?” Pike called, wandering the facility with a flashlight swinging around. “Pavel?”

He found a room. A little tiled white room with no light. It had a child-sized bed in the center, with a stuffed bear sitting on top of it. A drawing was hung over the bed. It had two unsmiling stick figures, one significantly taller than the other, labelled ‘11’ and ‘Papa.’ A table stood next to the figures, with some generic animal shape on it, possibly a dog.

Pike looked around at the room and he drew his conclusions.

This was a prison. A child’s prison.

“What was Pavel saying?” Jim asked. “Like home... but dark?”

“And empty,” Bones supplied.

“Empty and cold. Wait, did he say cold?” Scotty asked.

“I don’t know. The stupid radio kept going in and out,” Bones said.

Scotty sighed. “’s like riddles in the dark.”

“Like home. Like his house?” Jim asked.

“Or maybe like Riverside,” Bones said.

“Mirror,” Spock said.

“What’d he say?” Bones asked.

“Mirror,” Jim repeated. He walked over to the mirror still sitting on their game table. “When Spock showed us where Pavel was, he got out this mirror, right? A reverse. Everything is the same, but inverted, opposite.”

“Like home,” Scotty mused. “But just slightly different.”

“Completely different. And without any warmth. It’s shallow, empty, just a reflection. A mirror image.”

“Okay, hold up. I’m lost. What’re you two talking about?” Bones asked.

“Think about it. When Spock took us to find Pavel, he took us to his house, right?”

“Yeah? He wasn’t there.”

“But what if he was there? What if we just couldn’t see him? What if he was on the other side?” Jim asked. Bones continued to stare at him like he was speaking gibberish. “What if this is Riverside and this is where Pavel is?” He moved his hand up and down in the air and then gestured to the reflection of it in the mirror.

“Like a parallel dimension,” Scotty said.

“Or an alternate universe,” Jim said.

“Okay,” Bones said. “So if Pavel’s there, then how do we get there?”

Jim turned to Spock, laying on the basement's couch. "Do you know how to get there? To the mirror universe?"

He shook his head, and Bones groaned.

Aurelan walked into the house to find her parents sitting curled up on the couch together.

"Hey, kid," Ivan said.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"Your dad's going to stay here tonight. On the couch."

"I will be here as long as you need me, okay? How are you holding up?"

Aurelan pulled back the tarp hanging on the wall to reveal a massive, gaping hole, cold air blowing in through it. "What happened?" she demanded.

"Do not worry about that," Ivan said.

"Mom, that thing that you saw before, did it come back?"

"Aurelan, that's enough," Ivan said.

She ignored that. "Can we talk? Alone?"

"You need to leave," she hissed at her father.

"Look, I know you are upset. We all are. But you need to listen to me. Your mother is sick. Very sick."

"Yeah, well you being here, that's bound to make anybody feel sick. You're just making things worse, like always."

“Worse?!”

“Yeah!”

“She took down that wall with an ax,” Ivan whispered. “She said that Pavel was inside and that he was talking to her.”

“Yeah? Maybe he was.”

“This is not a joke, Aurelan. Your mother was half frozen to death when I got here. Trembling, scared out of her mind. Then you come in here and you start feeding into her hallucinations or delusions or whatever the hell you want to call it. You are going to push her right over the edge. Do you hear me, Aurelan?”

She said nothing. Ivan sighed.

“I am on your side. I’m here to help. I am going to make things better around here for all of us.”

She laughed. “Oh, well thank God you’re here. Don’t know what we would do without you.”

“Do me a favor. At the funeral tomorrow, just behave. If not for me, for your mother.”

Right, because Aurelan was the one who was out of control here. She swore she sometimes felt like the only responsible adult in her family. And she wasn’t even an adult yet.

Pike gasped awake on the couch in his trailer.

The last thing he remembered... he had been in Riverside Lab, looking for Pavel, and two workers in hazmat suits had cornered him and injected him with something.

On the coffee table in front of him was a large scattering of beer bottles and pills. Pills he didn’t use. Did they seriously think they could trick him like that? Make him think last night was all some

drug-induced hallucination? He knew what he saw, and he trusted his own damn eyes.

He flung the blanket off and grabbed his gun, running outside. No one. Nothing. They were already gone, probably had been for hours. He wondered how much they had dosed him with.

He went back inside and began methodically tearing his trailer to shreds. He took out the lightbulbs. He upended his cupboards. He sliced into the couch cushions. He looked through every pan, under the table, he disassembled the phone and inspected every component. He destroyed his lamps and took apart every electronic he owned.

He found the bug in his livingroom ceiling light. Figures. Should've checked there first.

They were onto him. Or rather, they knew he was onto them. His trailer was no longer safe. If he destroyed the bug, the transmission would cut out and they would know he had discovered it. They would come back and plant another, more carefully this time, better hidden.

No. He couldn't destroy it. He had to leave it in his trailer, fully functional, and feed them mundane background noise.

He didn't usually have that many people over anyway, it shouldn't be hard to avoid talking about anything sensitive in there.

Now to the Chekovs' house.

Sam and Aurelan sat on a bench at the graveyard, Pavel's funeral having just ended.

"This is where we know for sure that it's been, right?"

"Right, and that's Hikaru's house," Sam said, pointing on the map.

"And that's the woods where they found Pavel's bike. And that's my house."

“It’s all so close.”

“Yeah, exactly. I mean, it’s all within a mile of something,” Aurelan said. She tucked a lock of wavy black hair behind her ear. “Whatever this thing is, it’s not travelling far.”

Sam stared at her levelly. “You want to go out there.”

“We might not find anything,” she said.

“Or we might,” he said. “I found something. And if we do see it, then what?”

“Then we kill it.”

They approached Mr. Clarke at the wake.

“Hi,” he said fondly. “How are you boys holding up?”

“We’re in mourning,” Bones said.

“Christ, these aren’t real Nilla wafers,” Scotty said from his position beside the snack table. “They never have good food at a wake, I’m tellin’ ya.”

“We were wondering if you had time to talk?” Jim asked, smiling innocently. Adults loved his innocent smile. It worked like a goddamn charm.

“Sure,” Mr. Clarke said. They claimed a table off in the corner and sat down.

“Okay, so you’re familiar with the multiverse theory, correct?” Jim asked.

“Yes, but it’s just a theory.”

“I know. But theoretically, how would you travel there? To another

universe?”

“Well, basically, there are parallel universes. Just like our world, but just infinite variations of it. Which means there’s a world out there where none of this tragic stuff ever happened.”

“We aren’t talking about that,” Bones said.

“We were thinking more of like... an evil universe,” Scotty said.

“Yeah, exactly. So if a place like that existed, how would we travel there?” Jim asked. “Theoretically?”

Mr. Clarke took a pen out of his jacket pocket and began drawing on a clean paper plate. “Picture an acrobat standing on a tightrope. Now, the tightrope is our dimension. And our dimension has rules. You can move forwards, or backwards. That’s it. But what if, next to our acrobat, there’s a flea? Now, the flea can also travel back and forth, just like the acrobat. But unlike the acrobat, the flea can also travel along the side of the rope. He can even go upside down.”

“But we’re not the flea; we’re the acrobat,” Jim said.

“In this metaphor, yes, we’re the acrobat.”

“So we can’t go upside down?” Scotty asked.

“No.”

“Is there any way to do it?” Bones asked.

“Well, you’d have to create a massive amount of energy. More than humans are currently capable of creating, mind you, to open up some kind of tear in time and space, and then—“ he folded the paper plate in half and stabbed his pen tip through it, “—you create a doorway.”

“Like a gate?” Scotty asked.

“Sure. Like a gate. But again, this is all—“

“Theoretical. We know,” Jim said. “But what if this gate already existed?”

“Well, if it did, we’d know about it. It would disrupt gravity, the magnetic field, our environment. Heck, it might even swallow us up whole.”

Pike answered the knock on the door with a gun in his hand. His deputies backed up immediately.

“Jesus, Chief. Are you alright?” Nogura asked.

“I’m fine. What is it?” he snapped.

“Uh, we tried callin’, but you didn’t answer.”

“Phone’s dead.” That’s what happens when you bang it against a table for ten solid minutes and then rip out all its wiring.

Komack kept one eye on his boss’s gun while he talked. “So Bev Mooney came in this morning all upset. Said that Dale and Henry went hunting yesterday and didn’t come back home. They’re probably just on another binger, but I thought I’d tell you. I think this whole Pavel Chekov thing has everyone on edge.”

“Where was this?”

“At the station.”

“No, Komack, I mean where did they go hunting?”

“Oh. Out by Kerley.”

“Mirkwood,” he muttered. “Okay. Uh, you two head back to the station, I’ll take care of this.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh hey, they found that Gary kid’s car. Looks like he ran away after all,” Komack said.

“Staties found the car last night at a bus station. Funny, they keep doing our job for us,” Nogura said.

“Yeah. Funny.”

“What are you doing?” Joyce asked.

“What does it look like? Do you want to freeze to death all winter?” Ivan asked. He had been hammering boards up to cover the giant hole in the wall.

Joyce caught sight of a pile of twinkle lights lying on the coffee table.
“I told you not to take those down.”

“They were in the way, zolotse. How long were you going to keep those up? I mean, really?” He grabbed another board and angled the nail in just the right position before hitting it repeatedly on the head.
“You know, it is a shame what they have done to this family.”

“What?”

“The Sattler Company. I went to the quarry on the way over here. To look around, you know? Couldn’t believe it, just could not believe it. They had no warning signs, no fence, no nothing. They should be held accountable if you ask me.”

Jim poked a pencil through a folded sheet of paper, and Spock flinched. “It would take a lot of energy to build a gate like this, but that’s gotta be what happened. Otherwise, how’d Pavel get there, right?”

“Right,” Spock said.

“So we just wanna know if you know where the gate is,” Bones said.

Spock shook his head.

Bones threw up his hands. “Then how do you even know about this mirror universe anyhow?”

Spock looked at his hands in his lap, and then glanced over to Scotty. The guy was pacing around in circles, staring up at a compass.

“Scotty, what are you doing?” Jim asked.

He seemed totally and completely out of it. Unfortunately, not particularly unusual for Scotty.

“Scotty?”

“Scotty!”

He whirled on them. “Give me all of your compasses, right now!”

“What?”

“Your compasses! It’s a compass emergency, lads.”

They had a surprisingly high number of compasses on them, even for notoriously nerdy children. They emptied them all out onto the game table.

“Explain the compass emergency, Scotty,” Jim said.

“North is not in the north.”

“What the hell do you mean by that?” Bones asked.

“I meant what I said. North is not in the north. The north is wrong. It should be over there, and instead it’s all the way over there.”

“What are you talking about?” Jim asked.

Scotty sighed, as if explaining something to a group of

kindergarteners. He was, technically, the oldest. By one month and three days. “The sun rises in the east and it sets in the west, aye? So, since its afternoon, and the sun is over there, that means that north is in that direction. Only the compasses aren’t pointin’ that way.”

“Maybe they’re broken,” Bones.

“Do ye even know how a compass works? Do you see a battery pack on any of them? The needle is drawn naturally to Earth’s magnetic north. They can’t break.”

“But these ones have,” Jim said.

“Exactly,” Scotty said. Jim’s face lit up with understanding.

“Feel free to explain to me what the hell is going on any minute now,” Bones grumbled. He wanted to be a doctor when he grew up, not a damn physicist or whatever it was these two geeks were doing.

“We can use the compasses to find the gate!” Jim said. “Mr. Clarke said that the gate would affect the electromagnetic field, right? So that means it would affect compasses too.”

“The needles’ll point us straight at it,” Scotty said.

“You were here for the money! Admit it!” Joyce slapped the ad for the lawyer against Ivan’s chest. “You aren’t here because of Pavel. You don’t care about him. You never did!”

“His funeral was today; do we have to do this *right now?*”

“I can’t believe I fell for this!”

“I am here to help, Joyce! You should be grateful.”

“Grateful?!?”

“We could use the money for good!”

“Oh, like what, paying off your debts?!”

“Paying for Aurelan to go to school!”

“Oh, don’t do that.”

“Do what?”

“Lie to me!”

“I am not lying to you!”

“Yeah, well where does she wanna go?”

“What?”

“Where does Aurelan want to go to college?”

“We get the money, she can go anywhere!”

“NYU, Ivan! She’s wanted to go to NYU since she was six years old!”

“So then she goes to NYU!”

“Get out. Get out!”

“You need me here, Joyce.”

“I have not needed you for a looong time!”

“No? Look what happened!”

She gasped. “At least I was here!”

“Ha! Look around at this place! All your Christmas lights. What am I supposed to think? That you are some exceptional mother? You’re a mess!”

“Maybe I am a mess. Maybe I’m crazy. Maybe I’m out of my mind! But God help me, I will keep these lights up until the day I die if I

think there's even the slightest chance that Pavel's still out there! Now get out! Get out of my house!"

Aurelan stole Ivan's gun out of the glovebox of his car. She didn't feel the slightest morsel of regret.

Unfortunately, she was not a great shot.

"You're supposed to hit the cans, right?" Sam asked, smirking beside her in the field. She pushed her hair back out of her face.

"No, you see those spaces in between the cans? That's where I was aiming."

Sam grinned. "Ah, I see."

She rolled her eyes. "Have you ever even shot a gun before?"

"Have you met my parents?"

"Yeah, I suppose not. I haven't shot one myself since I was ten. My dad gave me a bunny on my birthday, let me name it and play with it all day, and then evening came and he made me take it out back and kill it. We had it for dinner that night. I cried for a week. My mom was so pissed."

"What, are you kidding me?"

"Cut me some slack, I was only ten. I was sentimental."

"No, I mean your mom. She got mad at you over that?"

"Oh, no, she got mad at my dad. She was fine with me."

"Oh," Sam said. "Good."

Aurelan fired and missed again. "Damn."

"Can I try?"

“Sure.” She passed him the gun, and he took careful aim.

“My parents would kill me if they saw me doing this,” he said conversationally. “Well, not literally, because that’s a sin, but they’d definitely tell me God was going to.”

“They big believers?”

“Ooh yeah,” he said. “Church twice a week, every week, plus family worship and all the stuff you have to do daily, spent every Saturday morning of my childhood preaching, learned how to cry on queue to guilt people into taking stuff. Wasn’t allowed to make any friends at school. Gary was the exception, because he let me preach to him just often enough to keep my mom happy.”

“You weren’t allowed to make any friends?”

“All worldly people are inherently evil and bad influences to my parents.”

“So are they okay with you hanging out with me?” Aurelan asked. Sam huffed.

“They think I’m at the library right now.”

“Screw them.”

“Yeah, screw them.” Sam pulled the trigger and shot straight through the center of the can.

“Oh no,” Scotty said.

“Oh no? What’s oh no?” Jim asked.

“We’re heading back home.”

“What? How do you know?” Bones asked.

“Because the sun is settin’ right there. We went in a big circle. Looped back around somehow.”

“How is that even possible? I thought you said the compasses would lead us straight to the gate,” Jim said.

“Aye, and they should be. Something else must be screwin’ with them, but it’d have to be one hell of a magnet.”

“Maybe the gate moved,” Jim said.

“No,” Bones said. “The gate didn’t move. Nothing is wrong with the compasses. There is no super magnet. It’s the freak. If he can hold people still with his mind, then he can definitely alter our perception. We only think we’ve been heading north. Isn’t that right, Spock?”

“Bones, c’mon. Why would he do that?” Jim asked.

“To sabotage our mission!” He walked closer until he was right in Spock’s face. “You did it, didn’t you? You don’t want us to reach the gate. You don’t want us to find Pavel. Admit it.”

“Leave him alone—“

“Admit it!” He grabbed Spock’s wrist and turned it around to display a green streak on the sleeve of his jacket. “Fresh blood. I knew it.”

“Bones, stop!”

“I saw him wiping his nose on the tracks! He was using his powers!”

“Bull! That’s old blood. Right, Spock?”

Silence.

“Right, Spock?” Jim asked again, more insistently.

“... It’s not safe.”

“I told you, he’s been playing us from the beginning!”

“That’s not true, he helped us find Pavel!”

“Find Pavel? Find Pavel?! Where is he then? Where the hell is he, Jim?”

“You know what I mean!”

“No, I actually don’t. Just think about it, Jim. He could’ve just told us where the mirror ‘verse was right away, but he didn’t. He just made us run around like headless chickens—“

“Alright, calm down—“ Scotty said.

“No! He used us! He helped just enough so he could get what he wants: food and a bed. He’s like a stray dog—“

“Screw you, Bones!”

“No, screw you, Jim! You’re just blind ‘cause you like that a guy’s not grossed out by you. But wake up! Wake the hell up! He knows where Pavel is, and he’s just letting him die in the mirror ‘verse!”

“Shut up!”

“For all we know, it’s his fault!”

“Shut up,” he said dangerously.

“We’re looking for some stupid monster. But did you ever stop to think maybe he’s the monster?”

“I said shut up,” Jim said, throwing himself at him. Then they wrestling on the ground in a furious tangle of flying punches and kicking limbs, Spock and Scotty both frantically yelling for them to stop.

Suddenly Bones flung himself backwards into a cement block, hard. The humans rushed to his side.

He wasn’t waking up.

“Why would you do that?!” Jim yelled. “What’s wrong with you? What is wrong with you?”

Spock was sitting in the testing room. A man was across from him, bound and gagged and beaten. He lifted his hand to the man’s meld points and closed his eyes, muttering the ancient ritual words that had been passed onto him, the words in another language whose meaning he didn’t know.

He entered the man’s thoughts and he began screaming. Spock ignored it, blocked out the outside world and continued his search. He broke through feeble defenses and ransacked the man’s mind, searching through every corner, every hidden thought, every buried secret.

There. Experimental data collected by the KGB. That was what Papa wanted. He reached out to touch the intercom system with his consciousness and let the information play through the facility.

A sound. Like snarling.

The man disappeared from Spock’s mind and he was in the no-place between universes, the realm of thoughts and feelings and memories and nothing physical. The place of mindscapes. And something else was here too.

It was coming for him.

He started running.

The snarling, pounding paws on the surface of nothing, it was coming closer, it was catching up. It was going to get him. His heart was hammering like a hummingbird’s wings in his side, and he was running faster than he ever had before, but did it matter? He was in the no-place, where distance didn’t exist. If the creature’s mind was strong enough, it would catch him.

He made the mistake of looking back at it.

It was a huge cat, larger than any from Earth, with ears that tapered into fine points and green and gold fur. Its tail was striped like a tiger’s, but on

its back was a jagged, almost mathematical pattern—a large splotch of gold that ended in regular points and diamonds that fell down from that.

It was not of Earth and it had no business in this plane.

Spock was running.

With a lurch, he found himself back in the testing room, sitting in the metal chair and panting.

When the boys finally woke Bones up, Spock was gone.

Night had fallen and Sam and Aurelan were still wandering the woods, hoping the monster would just happen to come to them. It was not the greatest of plans, but it was all they had.

“Hey,” Sam said. “Hey, stop.”

“What, what is it?”

“I think I heard something.”

They crept forward slowly in the dark, following the sound of soft whimpering to a young doe, badly injured and bleeding, laying unnaturally on its side. It was on the brink of death. But death would be a long time coming.

“It’s been hit by a car,” Sam said. “We can’t just leave it.” He shifted the gun in his hand and took hesitant aim.

“I’ll do it,” Aurelan said.

“I thought you said—“

“I’m not ten anymore.” She took the gun and clicked the safety off, pointing it at the deer’s head. It looked so helpless. She hesitated.

The deer was yanked back with sudden force, and both teenagers jumped away.

“What was that?” Sam whispered breathlessly.

They followed the faint trail of blood with their flashlights until it just stopped suddenly in the middle of a clearing. They fanned out, searching.

Sam found a hole in the base of a tree, dripping and covered with strange webbing. It seemed to go back farther than the tree should logically allow.

“Aurelan?” he called out. But she was too far away.

He bit his lip and shrugged off his bag, crawling into the hole. He emerged on the other side of the tree, in the same forest, but different. The trees were gnarled and curled in on themselves, all of them too young. Jagged, skeletal remains of older ones laid charred and broken all around. White ash drifted down through the air in the place of falling leaves. All the trees here seemed far too unhealthy to even have leaves, or to be alive in the first place, for that matter.

Sam’s flashlight flickered on and off intermittently. He hit it a few times and kept moving forward.

And then he saw it.

Huge, growling hungrily, digging into the deer like it was a feast, tearing of ounces of muscle and fur in a single bite, snapping through bones like they were made of plastic. It was a huge cat, bigger than any around here, bigger than a lion; green, with elven ears and a whipcord tail and too many muscles.

It heard his gasp.

Sam screamed and ran.